

# Jerusalem Perspective

A Monthly Report on Research into the Words of Jesus

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## Jesus' Education

*In the first part of this article we explained that Jesus' Galilean background probably ensured a high standard of religious education. In part two we survey the system of education which Jesus knew and the role of memorization in the learning process.*

A synagogue in the first century usually had its own *bet se-fer* (bet SE-fer, elementary school) and *bet mid-RASH* (bet mid-RASH, secondary school) in which children and adults studied Torah and the oral traditions. Formal education ended at the age of twelve or thirteen when most children went to work. The more gifted students who so desired could continue their studies at the *bet mid-RASH* together with adults who studied in their spare time.

A few of the most outstanding *bet mid-RASH* students eventually left home to study with a famous rabbi, being encouraged and sometimes supported by their families. Only the very promising students were urged to continue studying since their assistance was usually needed in agricultural work at home (Shmuel Safrai, "Education and the Study of Torah," *The Jewish*

*(continued on page 2)*

את לחם חקנו תן לנו היום

## Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

by Bradford Young

The deceptively simple petition from Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread," has been a matter of controversy for centuries. The unusual Greek word *ἐπιούσιον* (*ep-i-U-si-on*), which is translated "daily," is the root of the controversy. Some scholars have suggested that the original phrase contained the similar-sounding Greek word *ἐπειμι* (*EP-e-mi*, the next), and so meant "bread for the next day." Nevertheless, the Latin translation of the New Testament understood the word as meaning bread needed for sustenance.

Jerome (342-420 A.D.) remarked in his commentary on Matthew that he had found in the *Gospel of the Nazarenes* the Hebrew word *מחר* (*ma-HAR*, tomorrow) with the word for bread. However, *ma-HAR* has no tex-

*(continued on page 4)*

## Scholarly Assumptions

There are many scholarly approaches to the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The recent TIME cover story, "Who Was Jesus" (August 15, 1988), illustrated this well. Each approach stems from a number of basic assumptions or presuppositions.

For instance, many scholars today feel that it is impossible to know what the historical Jesus really said. At the root of this pessimism lies the basic presupposition that an organized record of Jesus' teaching never existed. The

Gospels therefore are seen as distant reports of Jesus' sayings which were filtered through a long process of oral transmission within Greek-speaking congregations. The result of this presupposition is that, as theologian Rudolf Bultmann wrote in 1926, "We can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."

However, the scholars of the Jerusalem School have evidence which suggests that Jesus' sayings were recorded shortly after his death — and in Hebrew, the lan-

guage in which they were probably spoken. Consequently the Jerusalem School begins its study with different assumptions, and is able to take a much more optimistic view of our ability to recover accurate information about the Jesus of history.

In forthcoming issues of JERUSALEM PERSPECTIVE we will examine a number of the central presuppositions of main-stream New Testament scholarship, and compare them with those of the Jerusalem School. JP



### *Jesus' Education* (continued from page 1)

*People in the First Century*, II, page 953).

One might assume that the synagogue, as the place of worship, would be considered more important or more sacred than the schools, but this was not the case. To this day the *bet mid-RASH* is given more prominence than the synagogue — not because education is valued more highly than worship, but because Judaism does not make a distinction between the two. Indeed, Judaism has always held that study of Torah is one of the highest forms of worship (cf. Shabbath 30<sup>a</sup>).

### **Diligent Study**

Jewish tradition contains many statements enjoining continued and diligent study, such as the passage in Avot 2:12: "Discipline yourself to study Torah, for you do not acquire it by inheritance." This point of view is echoed throughout the New Testament in such passages as the following:

[The Jews of Berea] were more noble...examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. (Acts 17:1)

Do your best to win God's approval as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, because he knows how to interpret the word of truth correctly. (II Timothy 2:15)

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness, knowledge.... (II Peter 1:5)

## **Jerusalem Perspective**

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## **Memorization**

Although scrolls were used for reading and study and the practice of writing was highly developed, written material was expensive because all manuscripts had to be hand-copied by trained scribes. Scrolls therefore were relatively scarce, and even though in Jesus' time every Jewish home had at least one of the approximately twenty biblical scrolls, few people had immediate access to more than a very small part of the entire library of sacred literature. Learning consequently involved a great deal of memorization. Professor Safrai has written concerning educational methods of the period:

Individual and group study of the Bible, repetition of the passages, etc., were often done by chanting them aloud. There is the frequent expression, "the chirping of children," which was heard by people passing close by a synagogue as the children were reciting a verse. Adults too, in individual and group study, often read aloud; for it was frequently advised not to learn in a whisper, but aloud. This was the only way to overcome the danger of forgetting. (*The Jewish People in the First Century*, II, page 953)

In the eyes of the rabbis, repetition was the key to learning, as these passages illustrate:

A person who repeats his lesson a hundred times is not to be compared with him who repeats it a hundred and one times. (Hagigah 9<sup>b</sup>)

If [the student] learns Torah and does not go over it again and again, he is like a man who sows without reaping. (Sanhedrin 99<sup>a</sup>)

Many methods were used to assist the student in memorizing his lessons, and one passage in the Talmud (Shabbath 104<sup>a</sup>) even describes in detail the mnemonic devices employed to teach small children the Hebrew alphabet. Elementary school students, who studied seven days a week, were given no new material on the Sabbath but rather used that time to memorize material learned earlier in the week (*The Jewish People in the First Century*, II, page 954).

Students enjoyed memorizing their lessons while strolling outdoors, but they were tempted to

shift their attention to the surrounding scenery. The Mishnah specifically warns against this:

A person walking along the road repeating his lessons who interrupts his memorization and exclaims: "What a beautiful tree!" or "What a beautiful field!" it is imputed to him as if he were guilty of a crime punishable by death. (Avot 3:8)

Such peripatetic memorization is still practiced today in the Middle East, and is the foundation of the Muslim system of education. In the Arab world one frequently can see young men walking back and forth along the roads at the outskirts of villages and towns, apparently talking to themselves. They actually are repeating and memorizing their lessons.

## **Jesus' Contemporaries**

From accounts found in Jewish sources such as those referred to above, one can form a reasonably accurate picture of what Jesus was doing in his childhood and adolescence. He was studying, committing to memory large amounts of material — Scripture and commentary on Scripture — all the available sacred literature of the day.

This was exactly what most of the other Jewish boys of Jesus' day were doing. The memorization of Written and Oral Law was such a large part of Jewish education that most contemporaries of Jesus had large portions of this material — at the least almost all of the Scriptures — firmly committed to memory. As Professor Safrai has stated:

The Scriptures were known almost by heart by everyone. From quite early in the Second Temple period, one could hardly find a little boy in the street who didn't know the Scriptures. According to Jerome (342-420 A.D.) who lived in Bethlehem and learned Hebrew from local Jewish residents in order to translate the Scriptures into Latin [producing the Vulgate Bible]: "There doesn't exist any Jewish child who doesn't know by heart the history from Adam to Zerubbabel [i.e., from the beginning to the end of the Bible]." Perhaps this was a bit of an exaggeration on Jerome's part, but in most cases his reports have proved reliable. (Safrai, Address, June 5, 1985) JP



**F**ive Hebrew consonants assume special forms when they appear as the last letter of a word.

One of the letters with a special final form is *mem*. A *mem* used anywhere other than at the end of a word looks like this: מ. As the last letter of a word, the *mem* looks like this: ם.

## Roots

The foundation of almost every Hebrew word is a root composed of three consonants. Each root has its own fundamental meaning. The vowels that fill out the three-consonant root to make a word may be varied in many ways, but something of the root's basic meaning will always remain.

The root of שָׁלוֹם is ש-ל-ם, *shin-LA-med-mem*, transliterated in English as SH-L-M. Its basic meaning is "completeness." Literally hundreds of Hebrew words are built from the root SH-L-M, and all of them have some connection to this basic meaning. For example: שָׁלֵם (*sha-LEM*) means "whole," although it is also the name of the city of Melchizedek mentioned in Genesis 14:18 (transliterated in English as "Salem"); שְׁלֵם (*SHE-lem*) means "peace offering," which symbolized the restoration of a broken relationship with God; שִׁלֵּם (*shi-LEM*) means "he paid," that is completely fulfilled his obligations. Notice that only the vowels in these Hebrew words vary.

## Various Meanings

Hebrew has a relatively small vocabulary, approximately one-tenth that of English, and one word can serve a variety of functions. One sees this with *shalom*, which usually is translated "peace," but means more than simply tranquility or the opposite of war. A quick look at a number of passages from the Bible will show other meanings of the word *shalom*, meanings that have not always been conveyed in English translations.

# Hebrew Nuggets

• **Friendship** Psalm 28:3 mentions those "who speak *shalom* but harbor malice in their heart," and Psalm 41:9 speaks of betrayal by a "man of *shalom*," that is by a close friend. Both passages contrast

friend to convey your regards to someone else, you simply tell him, דְּרִישָׁתָא שְׁלוֹם (*de-ri-SHAT sha-LOM*), which means, "Ask about the well-being" of that person.

• **Safety** Jephthah tragically vowed that if he returned from battle "in *shalom*," that is in safety, he would offer as a sacrifice to the Lord the first living thing that came out to meet him (Judges 11:31). *Shalom* is used with the same meaning in Isaiah 41:3, "He pursues them, advancing in *shalom*...." Jesus used this word in the same sense: "When a strong man fully armed guards his own dwelling, his belongings are in *shalom*" (Luke 11:21).

• **Salvation** *Shalom* is used poetically as a synonym for salvation. Isaiah 52:7 receives added significance when one realizes that the word which literally means peace was intended as a synonym for salvation: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger announcing *shalom*... announcing *salvation*...."

The Apostle Paul understood that "*Shalom, shalom*" in Isaiah 57:19 refers to salvation, not just peace, as his explanation in Ephesians 2:13-18 makes clear. One finds the same implication in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *shalom* to men on whom his favor rests." The well-known verse in Psalm 122:6, "Pray for the *shalom* of Jerusalem," would be understood more fully if *shalom* were translated "salvation" rather than "peace." However one must keep in mind when considering this passage that the word *shalom*, like all Hebrew words for salvation, refers to physical as well as spiritual deliverance - the Hebrews did not compartmentalize things as neatly as we Westerners do.

*Next month we will look at more examples of shalom in the Bible and rabbinic literature, and present further reading practice using the letters we have learned thus far.*

## Lesson Fifteen שָׁלוֹם — Shalom

*We have learned in previous lessons all the sounds of the word שָׁלוֹם (sha-LOM). The first letter of שָׁלוֹם is ש (shin), the "sh" sound. Under the shin is a ך (ka-MATS), indicating the vowel "a," as in "father." The second letter of the word is ל (LA-med), the Hebrew "l" which is followed by the "o" vowel, ho-LAM. The last letter of shalom is a mem, but it has a different form than the mem we learned previously.*

friendship with treachery, not peace with war. Similarly in I Kings 2:13, when Bathsheba asked Adonijah, "Is your coming *shalom*?" she was not asking if he had come peacefully, but if he had come with friendly intent. Although he answered "*Shalom*," it was treachery — but not war — that he had in his heart. When Jesus used the expression "son of peace" (Luke 10:6), he probably was not referring to a peace-loving man, but to a friendly, hospitable person.

• **Well-Being** One sees this meaning in II Kings 4:26, where the Shunammite woman was asked by Elisha's servant how she was. In the original Hebrew the question was simply, "Do you have *shalom*?" This is a familiar usage in modern Israel, where one inquires after a friend's well-being by asking, מַה שְׁלוֹמְךָ (*ma she-lom-KA*) or in the feminine form מַה שְׁלוֹמְךָ (*ma she-lom-MEK*), literally "How is your *shalom*?" And if you want the



## Our Daily Bread

(continued from page 1)

tual witness other than Jerome's recollection, and furthermore it cannot account for the somewhat obscure Greek word *epi-U-si-on*. While it is true that the Greek *EP-e-mi* is close to "tomorrow" in meaning, a translator most likely would have used the common Greek word for tomorrow, *αύριον* (*AU-ri-on*), to translate the Hebrew *ma-HAR*.

## Hebrew Background

The presence of *ἐπιούσιον* (*epi-U-si-on*), a rare Greek term, seems to indicate a more difficult Hebrew idiom than a common word like "tomorrow." The study of the Hebrew background of Jesus' words and his use of Scripture provides a more satisfactory solution, and one which is closer to the Greek text of the Gospels.

The Hebrew Scriptures could offer an answer to this problem. An unusual Hebrew idiom in Proverbs may have formed the basis of Jesus' petition. This verse also is a prayer:

Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me. (Proverbs 30:8, *Revised Standard Version*)

"The food that is needful for me" is a translation of *לֶחֶם חַיִּי* (*LE-ḥem ḥu-KI*). The word rendered "food" is actually *לֶחֶם* (*LE-ḥem*), Hebrew for bread. By way of extension, it represents all of man's physical needs, and the expression *לֶחֶם חַיִּי* (*LE-ḥem ḥu-KI*) refers to one's allotted portion. This verse in Proverbs seems to be related to the whole complex of ideas expressed in the Lord's Prayer.

When a person petitions God, he ought to ask for what he needs to sustain him — neither tremendous wealth nor poverty, but his allotted portion according to God's plan. This seems to be the intent of *epi-U-si-on* — an appeal to God for man's necessary provision.

## Rabbinic Allusion

Like the other sages of his time, Jesus often alluded to Scripture without quoting the full text of the

passage. Although a passage of Scripture might only be partially quoted, the whole passage would be discussed in the following exposition. One could not understand the exposition without being familiar with the entire passage. In this petition from the Lord's Prayer we have an example of Jesus' allusive use of Scripture. It would have been "unprofessional" of him to quote Proverbs 30:8 in full, and a lengthy quotation would have been out of place in prayer.

Jesus' original audience was sufficiently acquainted with Scripture to catch his allusion and recognize the passage. However, because the words of Jesus have been translated into Greek, it is not always easy to recognize when Jesus was hinting at a Scripture passage. Translating this petition in the Lord's Prayer from Greek to Hebrew enables one more easily to identify Jesus' allusion to the passage in Proverbs, and to better understand Jesus' words.

## Israel in the Wilderness

Jesus' reference to the disciples' "daily bread" is reminiscent of the experiences of the children of Israel in the wilderness. God regularly sent them manna, but since only one day's supply was provided, the people had to depend on God for their daily portion (Exodus 16:4-10). On the morning of the day preceding the Sabbath, each Israelite gathered a double portion of manna so that he would not desecrate the Sabbath by gathering food.

Rabbi Eleazar of Modi'im taught:

This [the expression *יֶרֶךְ יוֹם בְּיָמֵינוּ* (*de-VAR yom be-yo-MO*, a day's portion in its day) in Exodus 16:4] means that a man may not gather today his portion for tomorrow as he does for the Sabbath, as it is said, "each day that day's portion." He who created the day also created its sustenance. (Mekilta Beshallah Vayassa 2; to Exodus 16:4)

The disciple, like the children of Israel in the wilderness, is totally dependent upon God for his every need. Rabbi Shim'on ben Eleazar asked:

In all the days of your life have you ever seen a wild animal or a bird laboring in a vocation? Yet they are not anxious about earning a living. They were created to serve me, but I was created to serve my Maker. How much more then should I earn my living without being anxious. (Kiddushin 4:14)

## Focus on Today

The primary focus of this petition in the Lord's Prayer should be on the words "this day." It might be noted that Luke's version, "each day" (Luke 11:3), seems to be an adaptation of Matthew's source, "this day." Matthew's version correctly preserves the impact of Jesus' saying, which emphasizes "today."

The Talmud states concerning Hillel that "...all his actions were for the sake of Heaven, as it is said, 'Blessed be the LORD day by day' [Psalm 68:19]" (Betzah 16<sup>a</sup>). In his approach, Hillel emphasized the "today" of his existence for the sake of Heaven. Similarly, Rabbi Eliezer said, "Anyone who has a piece of bread in his basket today and says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' belongs to those of little faith!" (Sotah 48<sup>b</sup>).

Jesus likewise focused on today. The promise that God will provide for a disciple's physical needs must be viewed in the context of Jesus' exhortation to put God's Kingdom above all else:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well. Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Tomorrow will be anxious about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:33-34)

Jesus was adamant concerning anxiety about the future:

Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:25-26)

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